

August 29, 2021

Learned Anything Lately?

Proverbs on Teachability & Matthew 7:13-27

My grandparents were very influential in my life. Yes, they taught me many wonderful things about Jesus, God, and the Bible. But more importantly, they lived out their faith. They simply integrated their faith in Jesus into their lives. So when I (or one of my 12 cousins) needed wisdom, we often went to my grandparents for godly counsel ...

Each of us is who we are today – in large part – because of the influence of others in our lives. Some of those influences have been good ... some not so good. Some of those influential people have been formal educators (teachers, coaches, professors), some have been family (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, even siblings), some have been friends, colleagues, and co-workers. Some are our favourite website curators, media influencers, bloggers, authors. We may have even learned some things in church – from Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, small group leaders, maybe even pastors.

- Who were influential (formal or informal) teachers in your life?
- What made that person so important?
- What did that person teach you?
- Right now, who *is* the most influential person/blogger in your life?
- Right now, what is that person/website/newsfeed teaching you?

The book of Proverbs is about learning wisdom. While some models of education suggest that it's all about "learning the facts," Proverbs takes a more holistic view of life and learning. Knowing facts is not enough. You need to know how to use knowledge. Wisdom is knowing God's truth, applying it to your life, AND living it out. In the Bible, education is a process of learning AND integrating what we know in such a way that our attitudes, values, and lives are practically transformed by God's wisdom. As life unfolds, as we face new circumstances, the world changes, technology changes, our health changes, Proverbs tells us we need hearts, minds, and souls taught by His Spirit. AND we need to live out our faith in practical ways. My grandparents knew that. And my cousins and I recognized that in their lives.

Learning wisdom, in the Bible, is not about memorizing facts. Wisdom is about being INFORMED – learning God's truth – being FORMED – allowing God to shape our hearts, minds, and souls – so we are TRANSFORMED – we respond to challenges and situations wisely, as Jesus would if He were He in our shoes. We live differently because of Jesus.

Because we always face new situations, wise people know learning is a life-long process.

The Simple/The Fool ...

In Proverbs, the opposites of the wise person, are the simple person and the fool. The simple person finds simplistic answers, goes with what they feel, and finds knowledge from teachers who give them what they want to hear. You let your chosen "experts" – who just

happen to share your ideas – guide your life. Your preferred bloggers, websites, YouTube celebrities, Instagram or Facebook posters (who just happens to agree with you), give you all you need to know ... The “simple” way to live is actually not to think at all.

- *"The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps"*(14:15).
- *"A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simple person goes blindly on and suffers the consequences"*(22:3 and 27:12).

Similar to the “simple” person is the “fool.” In biblical terms a foolish person is not a joker – he is someone who says in his heart *"there is no God."*(Psalm 14:1). If I’m this person, I know it all. I’m right. If everyone agreed with me, things would be perfect. When things go well, I can say, “I told you so,” but when things go badly ...? I blame others. It must be other people’s fault, because I’m right, right? I can’t accept I might be wrong, because I **am** right – that’s who I am (at least that’s what I tell other people, I may suspect otherwise). Proverbs warns us, *"Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others"*(12:15).

Both simple people and fools have stopped learning. They’ve got it all figured out. They’ve stopped thinking. They let other people think for them. They live in a world of news feeds, websites and YouTube videos that just happen to support their views ...

What’s the Alternative?

Genuine learning begins when I actually stop. I think. When I face new challenges and – instead of saying, *"I’m going to find websites and YouTube videos that support my gut feeling ..."* I consider possibilities. I ask hard questions. I think deeply. I aim to learn. I ask, *How does **God’s Word** teach me wisdom in this situation?* Then – only then – do I act.

A wise person, in the Bible, is someone who humbles himself before the Lord. Humility is a key biblical virtue, celebrated from Genesis through Revelation. Humble people know we don’t know it all. We recognize we can learn from God. And we can benefit from good – godly – wisdom from those who know more than us.

One of the qualities of a prudent or wise person is **teachability**. A wise person does NOT think they know it all. They want to learn. In humility, we read the Bible – the whole Bible (not just our favourite bits). We seek new wisdom to face new challenges.

- *"People who despise advice are asking for trouble; those who respect a command will succeed."*(13:13)
- *"Wise people are always ready to learn. Their ears are open for knowledge."*(18:15)
- *"Only a fool despises a parent’s discipline; whoever learns from correction is wise."* (15:5)

A humble person – a wise person – a teachable person – is eager to learn from God Himself (Scripture), and from godly, wise, knowledgeable, reputable – good – teachers ...

Wise people are always proactively seeking to learn. They are life-long learners. These are

the people who see challenges and take them – like learning new skills (learning a musical instrument, painting, or a language), helping with children or youth, reading challenging books, volunteering at the Soup Kitchen, inviting students over for lunch. These people actively move out of their comfort zone to try something new. They do it, not for the sake of learning facts, but to learn more about God, how He is at work in the world, in their lives, and in the lives of other people ... And how to live wisely.

In Proverbs, some of the qualities of a wise person include:

a. A wise person gets good advice.

I can muddle through on my own. I can make my own mistakes – and learn from them. Or I can learn from others who have already made the mistakes ... who have accumulated years of experience and wisdom. Which is wiser? The simple person might say, *"It's too much work to get advice; it's easier to go with my gut. That's what God would want me to do ..."* The foolish person might say, *"Educated people are all wrong anyway – I know that – so I'm going to go with what I know is best. Who are these 'experts' anyway?"*

The wisdom of Scripture says:

- *"Get all the advice and instruction you can, so you will be wise the rest of your life. You can make many plans, but the LORD's purpose will prevail."* (19:20-21)
- *"The instruction of the wise is like a life-giving fountain; those who accept it avoid the snares of death."*(13:14)

In what areas of your life do you need advice?

b. A wise person accepts correction

This is a tough one! I don't like to be told I am wrong – ever. But I really appreciate those godly and wise mentors and friends who, in genuine love, offer me guidance. It takes strength of character and a strong self-image to accept correction. I need to be humble to hear how the Lord is speaking to me through godly mentors:

- *"To learn, you must love discipline; it is stupid to hate correction."* (12:1)
- *"Correct the wise, and they will love you. Instruct the wise, and they will be even wiser. Teach the righteous, and they will learn even more."* (9:8-9)
- *"Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored."*(13:18)

There is a footnote to this, of course. Be careful if you see yourself as "The Corrector." If I think my mission is correcting other people's mistakes (because I'm right), there is an eerie tone of self-righteousness and arrogance, isn't there? Who does that remind you of? The fool ...? Correction only comes out of a deep relationship of love and trust:

- *"Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy."*(27:6)
- *"The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense."*(27:9)

- *"As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend."* (27:17)

If we haven't built a relationship of friendship/trust, we have no right to be "The Corrector."

c. A wise person thinks before they act; then they DO act

- *"The wicked bluff their way through, but the virtuous think before they act."* (21:29)
- *"Wise people think before they act; fools don't, and even brag about their foolishness."* (13:16)

In humility, we read Scripture, pray faithfully, learn from and talk with godly mentors (people we KNOW, TRUST, and have a REALTIONSHIP with ... not some anonymous blogger). Our knowledge of God and His wisdom shapes our hearts, our souls, our minds – our whole beings. Then we put in practice what we've learned. We live it out. Our lives, more and more, reflect the character of Jesus. Shaped by His Spirit, qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control blossom in our lives ...

- *Am I becoming more and more like Jesus as I move forward?*
- *Is my life becoming more full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? (fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23)*
- *OR am I becoming angry? Bitter? Critical? Frustrated? Afraid? Judgmental?*

Jesus warns us, *"Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act ..."* (Matthew 7:15-16). We cousins KNEW our grandparents. We knew they were wise people – we saw the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and we saw their influence create good fruit in our lives. If you are listening to teachers and NOT becoming more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled ... if you are more critical, angry, defensive, unhappy, fearful, judgmental, or bitter ... you need to find more godly teachers!

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock," says Jesus (Matthew 7:24). Wisdom is listening to Jesus' teaching. AND follow it. What teaching? The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). What is this all about? If you are serious about learning godly wisdom, reread it this afternoon. It's all about living out the great commands in your life: loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength AND loving your neighbour as yourself. Love God. Love your neighbour. Live it out.

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 First Baptist Church
 1614 – 5th Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3
 (403) 327-2082
bruce@firstb.net